

Interview with Anthony J. Perna

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

COLONEL ANTHONY J. PERNA

Interviewed by: Francine D. Haughey

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Q: I would like you to start this interview by giving me your name, where you were born, went to school, etc. Why you chose to go into the Air Force?

PERNA: OK, a biographical sketch, just hitting the high spots. My name is Anthony Joseph Perna. I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1918 of Italian-American parents. I spent my youth on Long Island and got my elementary education in a rural area called Commack. Subsequently went to Mineola, another rural area and graduated from High School in Mineola in 1935. I was an average student, interested in average subjects, and keen about golf as a hobby. I was a product of the depression days and had to work for a couple of years before I was able to enter Syracuse University. I began at Syracuse in '39, and was a member of the class of 1941. In this period of my life, I became enamored with a local girl, Betty (Silliman) and enjoyed two years of her company while at Syracuse as a freshman and sophomore. I was majoring in Spanish and in advertising working toward a commercial degree and hoping to go to Latin America, with a qualification in Spanish, and get hooked up with the Otis Elevator Company (to which my family had some connections). When Betty graduated in '39, I returned for my junior year. I was self employed and self supporting. I worked in a sorority house as a houseman, maintaining the house, keeping the furnace, waiting on tables, and doing the bidding of the

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housemother. This provided me with my board, and for my room, I worked in the University library stacking books. I had various odd jobs for making money and was able to support myself. In my junior year, I was feeling the pains of my loved one being on Long Island, and I decided in 1939 that I wanted to be with her and wanted to get married. I went to Long Island on a visit and decided that we couldn't manage it for financial reasons and I, at that time, investigated the opportunity of going into the Air Force. I subsequently signed up, took a temporary job on a newspaper selling advertising, and waited until the spring of 1940, when I got my appointment as a flying cadet. I joined the United States Army Air Corps, went off to Tulsa, Oklahoma where I began my primary flying training.

Q: So you were in the Air Force through the war, really?

PERNA: This began in 1940, a year before the war, and I graduated on December 20 of 1940, married December 22 and spent all '41 as a flying instructor on bombers until Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941. At this time, because of my experience in bombers, I was sent to a base in Florida at Sebring, called Hendricks Field, where we began the first B-17 school and, I, because of my experience with heavy bombers, became a pilot instructor at Sebring, and then commander of the instructor school. It was here that we were training pilots and co-pilots to fly B-17s. They left us and went to an operational training unit where they got their navigators, bombardiers and gunners and eventually went off to the 8th Air Force in England.

Q: But you never went overseas?

PERNA: I did not at that time. I stayed in the training business from 1941, the beginning of World War II up until 1944. I went about the country opening up additional B-17 schools. I eventually went to the headquarters of the Training Command up in Fort Worth and supervised these 4 engine bomber schools. We had 4 B-24 and 4 B-17 schools. I spent a lot of time doing anti- submarine work in the two years we were in Florida. This was a period when the German wolf packs of submarines had control of the shipping lanes from

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Galveston/Houston, all the way to Bayonne, New Jersey. We were working with the Navy trying to suppress this submarine threat.

Q: Along the coastline of the United States?

PERNA: Along the coastline of the Gulf Coast and up the Atlantic coast.

Q: Within how many miles were they?

PERNA: They were close enough that on some occasions, when we would sink one, and they found in the personal effects of the crew that they had theater stubs from Miami, and from Palm Beach, where they had come ashore at night in rubber boats, spent a few days on the beach, and then gone back and joined their boat. They had complete control of the shipping lanes. We were successful in getting a few of them and we had a few airplanes that were shot up.

Q: They could very well have come and invaded the United States at that time?

PERNA: Well, in the case of Jekyll Island, GA where a great many American millionaires had their homes, the War Department insisted that these wealthy and famous Americans be evacuated because they were fearful that the submarines could come and take them hostage. As a result, they all left the island in a caretaker status. And this happened on many resort areas along the coast. You will see even now the remnants of towers, and gun emplacements, and lookout positions for submarines on the Maryland coast, the Long Island coast, and all down through the Carolinas, still remnants of this period of '42, '43, when the wolfpacks were so successful. But we had our taste of combat getting shot at by submarines while we were trying to get them with depth charges. But we were primarily in the training business, and we would assign so many airplanes each day to the Navy to supplement their search program.

Q: When did you go overseas then?

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PERNA: I went overseas in the end of the war and it was again in a training capacity. I had moved through the B-17s and the B-24s and then up to the B-29s. The B-29, you'll remember, is a super fortress and we had over a thousand of them stationed on Guam, Tinian, and Saipan. This is where they mounted the offense against the Japanese homeland and began a systematic strategic bombing of population centers as well as strategic targets of petroleum, oils, lubricants, communications, and defense positions.

Q: Were you in the Far East?

PERNA: I was out there in a training capacity. I was running one of the B-29 schools, and I went over to represent the training command with the users, the Commander of the 21st Air Force, General LeMay. We worked on providing what they wanted in the replacement crews. We were school teachers and, parenthetically, I would tell you that this was very ironic the way it worked. When we got picked as school teachers, we were picked originally because we had the highest grades in our class, and the people who had less proficiency, pardon my braggadocio, but, they would be sent to combat. They kept the best ones as we were instructing and we needed more instructors. We didn't keep the poorer students to be instructors, we kept the best ones and sent the other guys overseas. The ones we sent and who went to war were back in a year, covered with decorations, and about two grades higher, but also many of them were killed. So it was a strange thing, and many of the guys who worked for me cursed us because we were keeping them in a permanent training establishment.

Q: Keeping them from promotion?

PERNA: Keeping them from promotion and keeping them from going to war, and they were all young and full of vinegar and wanted to get in to it. And so it was.

I wound up as a Staff Director of B-17 and B-24 programs, and then I got a B-29 school, and I was a Commander of a B-29 school at Denver, Colorado. At the end of the war,

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in '44, '45, we were in the Marianas talking with the user agency which was the 21st Air Force. (Incidentally, I just came home from this conference out in Seattle which was a reunion of all the B-29 people that the Boeing people had in August of 1992 celebrating what the B-29 did for the United States and what the people in the B-29 flying business did and what the people in Boeing did to win the cold war with this airplane.)

The war ended in August '46, the war ended in August '45 when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In January 1946, a couple months later, I joined the unit that had dropped the bomb, and I became Deputy of the 509th Composite Bomb Wing. We organized a program to go to an island called Kwajalein in the Pacific in the Marshall Islands where we set up the Bikini bomb test. The Bikini bomb test was called Operations Crossroads. This was a program to detonate a nuclear weapon under scientifically controlled and test condition. The ones we had detonated heretofore was the test one in White Sands (the first one that went off), and then the second one was the one we dropped on Hiroshima, and the third one was dropped on Nagasaki. There was no test data to speak of, so we set up this test program and dropped one from an airplane onto a target ship, the Nevada. We had a whole fleet of navy vessels, a whole bunch of army buildings, and army materiel, including guns and tanks, etc...

Q: To be destroyed?

PERNA: Everything to be tested, to see what happened when you dropped a nuclear weapon. We dropped from 30,000 feet. I did not fly the airplane that dropped it. I was flying an airplane around the target site and I had what we call blast gauges in my airplane. When we came down to the point that they were going to release the bomb, I released these blast gauges. Other pilots with other bombers like mine released blast gauges and with telemetering equipment and radio transmission they were able to record the blast and the data scientifically so that they could find out at various altitudes how much intensity you had from the burst of the bomb.

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Q: How far away were you from the blast?

PERNA: I was eleven miles slant range. When the bomb went off here and I was eleven miles at 28,000 feet. We wore goggles for fear of retina damage to the eyes. When the shock wave hit us the whole airplane jerked. It felt like someone took a tremendous plank and slammed it against the airplane, and this was at 11 miles.

Well, we stayed out there for the second shot which was where we put a weapon on a tower again up at the Bikini lagoon and we set it off on a tower about 200 feet above the ground.

Q: This was how much later?

PERNA: This was just a matter of weeks, a month later. We did a test in April and May, and then we came home in the summer. We had to produce all the scientific data and recording material that we had. We had a tremendous array of instrumentation from Los Alamos and from all the scientific community in America, including some of the scientific colleges. These people were under contract to the War Department and recording the data to see what would happen. We had animals, we had materiel, we had structures, we had medicines, we had everything you can think of that somebody wanted to see what were the effects of a nuclear detonation. This was a very impressive moment in my life and I was convinced when I saw the thing go off that you could never use these. Then I spent the rest of my life hauling them around as part of the deterrent against the Russians. But I was convinced when I saw that one go off that this was not the answer for mankind. But we used the threat of them as a successful deterrent.

This Kwajalein "Crossroads" duty with the 509th lasted until the summer when we got our data together, then packed up and came back to Roswell, N.M. and Washington and turned in our report. I delivered the Air Force report called "The employment of nuclear

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weapons by the US Air Force” to the Air Force headquarters. This was Top Secret in those days.

A lot of service politics were involved and interesting at the time. The weapons had large explosive charges put in a casing, they called them “Fatman.” The Fatman was probably 5 or 6 feet high, probably 8 or 10 feet long. In the core of it was where the uranium went. This was the material that caused the fission, but to make it detonate you had to have an implosion of all the high explosives. When it exploded inward, it made the U235 go critical, and you caused the fission phenomena. The ingredients U235 capsule that went inside was controlled by the Navy. We had a Navy Admiral on board our Air Force airplane, Admiral Parsons, who was the man who had inserted it on the flight to Hiroshima. So the Air Force did not have control of the whole thing, the Navy had control of the critical ingredients of the bomb, and he had to wait until we took off, and when we got in flight ...

Q: It was inserted in flight?

PERNA: It was inserted in flight, when you were at low altitude and didn't need oxygen to get in the bomb bay to put the thing in. This was a very interesting period. We had everybody in the world out there looking at the test.

Q: What do you mean by that?

PERNA: Well, all kinds of foreign diplomats, allies but there were no Russians there, but we had lots of the scientific community.

Q: This was for Bikini?

PERNA: This was for Bikini. We had lots of Asians, and all of our European allies were there. As a Deputy of the Composite Bomb Wing that was doing it, we were deeply involved in meeting all of these people, and helping. It was an interesting time to rub shoulders with the highest level of the scientific community in America who were all out

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there. Teller, and you name any of them, they all went out to see the shot, and see it themselves.

At the conclusion of these tests, I had the opportunity to take the exams for the regular Air Force. I was a reservist, I was not in the regular Air Force. I got a reserve commission when I got my wings back in 1940. I took the exams and passed them and I got into the regular Air Force. As soon as I got my regular commission, they gave me the opportunity to go back to college and finish my degree, provided I'd take what they wanted. The Air Force wanted aeronautical engineers, they wanted physicists, they wanted chemical engineers, they wanted electrical engineers, and they had one spot open in political science, international relations, and it was at Syracuse, Maxwell School of Citizenship. I was able to finagle the appointment there. I went back to Syracuse, and they gave me two years, but I only stayed for a year and a half, and I got my Bachelor's degree in Political Science. By this time, I had three children. They were born during the process of World War II while I was training people in B-17s, and my son was born in Syracuse, when I was a student finishing my undergraduate work. I was the Commandant of all the military students who were there. The Army, Navy, and the Marine Corp had students going to school also. I was the baby sitter for all of them and had to make arrangements with the University, etc. We had to appear and perform certain functions for national holidays, etc.

At the conclusion of my studies, I went into Strategic Air Command and very briefly, I was a Base Commander at Spokane, with B- 29s, and I was a Squadron Commander at Spokane with B-29s, and this is in the period starting in '48.

I went to England and became a Base Commander at Lakenheath, and then at Mildenhall. This was interesting because, when Khrushchev closed access to the city of Berlin and blockaded it, our government decided that we would feed and supply the city by air. We commenced what was called the Berlin airlift. Coincident with it, we put B-29 bombers in England and took our weapons with us. We hauled these old weapons I described for you, "Fatman."

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Q: Nuclear?

PERNA: Nuclear weapons to England in 1948. This has now become public knowledge, but at the time, no one knew it, except a very few people. It was closely guarded. However, it was leaked to the Russians, so the Russians knew it. The way it came about was that Truman and his Chief of Air Staff, (Hoyt) Vandenberg, and Attlee, the Prime Minister of England, and his Chief of the Royal Air Force, a guy named Lord (Tedder), the four of them got together without any staff, and they agreed that they would do this. Congress did not know it, Parliament did not know it. It was an agreement between the two Heads of State with their two Air Force chiefs. They went ahead and did it, and eventually told the rest of the people, in the State Department, and in the Defense Department, "We're doing it." We moved about six squadrons of these B-29s over to England. We'd keep them there 90 days and then replace them with other squadrons—this went on for 24 months.

Q: Who was President at that time?

PERNA: Truman. They took their weapons with them. We went to these World War II airfields and had to reopen them and it was chaotic. It was like the movie "Twelve O'Clock High" going back to a base and having to start the thing up again. I was the Commander in one of these bases for a year, then I went to the base next door, and commanded it. I worked in the Headquarters initially as the Plans Officer setting the thing up with a General by the name of Leon Johnson. It was a very exciting time, organizing the USAF reinvasion of England with their Air Ministry.

Q: Did you participate in the airlift?

PERNA: Yes. Our job was to hold this deterrent over the Russians' head by having the B-29 capability to bomb out of England. We had to set up a depot to repair the airplanes that were flying the airlift, those were the C54 transports.

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Q: They came to your base?

PERNA: They came over to Burtonwood which was near us where they repaired them. Our job was to provide deterrents to make the Russians stop being any worse than they were. After the Berlin airlift got their production up to like 20,000 tons a day, the Russians threw the hat in and said: "OK" and they opened up the autobahns, and they opened up the canals for barge traffic, and they opened up the railroads and life went on. The B-29 deterrent in England and the Berlin airlift were successful.

Q: And you went back to the States?

PERNA: I stayed there until '51, went back to the States. I went through the Air Force Staff College at Norfolk. It's a joint college for people then up at the Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel level. I had been promoted to Colonel when I was in England as Base Commander. I had ten years' service and I made Colonel, then for the next twenty years, I stayed Colonel. Got it quickly.

Q: But you became eventually Attach# to the Embassy in Tel Aviv. Did you request that, how did that happen?

PERNA: Well, to fill you in very quickly, I came home and went to the Air Staff, and I ran the training aids business ...

Q: The training what? Excuse me.

PERNA: Training equipment, training aids. They call them "special training devices." Training aids are all kinds of props and equipment, including films, manuals, cutaways of engineering systems in the airplane, and simulators. I was successful in introducing simulators at that time into the Air Staff.

Q: Which are...?

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PERNA: Simulators are replicas of the cockpit of the airplane which generate all the responses you get when you are flying the airplane. You put the crews in the simulators and they can perform all the functions of starting, taking off, etc...

Q: For training purposes?

PERNA: Yes. And you can have them lose a couple of engines and see if they're able to cope with flying the airplane. But when they crash, you just put all the computers back and start over again. The simulators have become very, very successful. They are used by everybody including the Atomic Energy Commission where they simulate the control rooms at our nuclear power plants. The Navy uses them for simulating the nuclear submarine control. You do all this critical training on the simulator where with several mechanisms and with digital computers, you simulate the responses of the instruments or the feel of the airplane in order to give beginners a chance to learn without wrecking the equipment. I was instrumental in getting these into the Air Staff and getting them into the Air Force, and I got a lot of good publicity from doing this.

I then went to SAC and became Wing Commander of a B-47 Wing. These are jet bombers with 6 engines. This was in the period of John Foster Dulles and Eisenhower with their foreign policy of deterrence. Hold the club over the Russians and make them behave. SAC was built up to be a preeminent elite force for the entire Defense Department at that time, and I was Commander of one of the Wings. We had 20 some Wings that were on alert day and night, some airplanes in the air, some airplanes at the end of the runway all ready to go, all equipped with nuclear weapons. It was very pressure filled business. You were at the end of a phone all the time. I had good success. I had one Wing at Abilene, Texas, and I moved from there to El Paso, and I had a Wing at El Paso, and then I came back to Abilene, and took that one over again. I was enjoying great success.

Q: A Wing comprises what?

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PERNA: 48 bombers and 20 tankers. These are airplanes comparable to ...

Q: Tankers that refill in flight?

PERNA: In flight. The tankers are 707 type, and the bombers were B-47 and B-52. These are like Jumbo Jets and like 707s that you know in commercial aviation. I was running the Wing that had these. I got in to the diplomatic business because I left SAC. I left SAC due to an unfortunate incident. One of our crews had dropped a nuclear weapon into a swamp near Florence, South Carolina, and the press was so severe on it that Eisenhower ordered the air force to stop flying these weapons. Stop! And we did stop. It interfered with our training greatly because the crews needed, as you turn people over, to get acquainted with handling the bomb, and you need to practice, practice. We did radar bombing, pretending we were going to bomb Denver, or Los Angeles, or New York, and we had a bombing scoring site down there, a radar site who would track us coming and we released the signal, and the signal was interrupted, that was when we would have released the bomb. Knowing all the ballistic data, they would know where the bomb would have hit, and was it successful or not. We were graded on this. LeMay did a tremendous job in building the efficiency of this Strategic Air Command force. He was a tremendous organizer and a great leader and he took good care of his people. He got housing for his enlisted men and housing for the officers, and he got spot promotions, and made it a real elite force. We were very proud. In any event we were prohibited from flying the weapons because of this incident in Florence and it was hurting our training badly. General LeMay prevailed upon the Commander in Chief, Eisenhower, to let us go back to training. I was picked with my unit to fly the first mission after we had stood down for about 3 months. I had everybody in the country and the Air Force looking over my shoulders seeing what I was doing and how I was doing it. I decided I was going to fly the mission myself. I had a lot of time in the airplane and I was an instructor pilot and I wasn't going to leave it to anybody else. So I spent the night in the alert facility next to the end of the runway in order that we could leap up when the bell went off, run and jump in the airplane and be off in less than 15 minutes

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with these mammoth airplanes. We would have the airplane “cocked” as we called it, do everything possible up to starting the engines, buckling your parachute, and shutting the canopy, and disconnecting the power, and go. We did all of this. We had to put “JATO” on, jet assisted take off rocket bottles in order that we could be sure to get off in hot weather conditions with the load we had. We had wing tip tanks, we had the full body tanks, and we had the bombs in the bomb bay. We had to use the “JATO” to be sure we could get off the ground in case we had the alert to go in the middle of the day when it was hot and it took you a long, long run to get enough speed to take off. So, after great haranguing by everybody looking over my shoulder, we finally went to bed and next morning at seven thirty in the morning, they called the alert, “Go” and we went. We had five airplanes that were to go and fly a simulated bombing mission. I was No. 1, and I was off and gone in thirteen minutes. The No. 2 man behind me was off and gone. The No. 3 man, as he was taking off ... What you would do was bring the airplane up to full power, six of these jet engines, let the brakes go, and when you get to 75 knots, you would hit the JATO bottle switch, and then these 15 rockets that were strapped to the back of the airplane would give this tremendous blast to shoot you up, like the space vehicles use rockets to get them up. When he fired his rockets at 75 knots, the tower called him and said: “You're on fire. The whole back of your airplane is on fire. Bail out, bail out.” I could hear this. I was out starting a turn, to pick them up in the turn after take off. This fellow's name was Youngmark who was flying it, he was a Major. As it turned out, he never heard the tower, but the co-pilot in the back seat could see the reflection of the fire on their tip tanks, and the reflection made him look and he saw it was on fire, and they said: “Bail out, bail out.” They got up to about six hundred feet, and exploded the canopy off, and the two of them ejected. They have big cartridges under the seat that shoot you up these rails and you go out, and then your parachute opens automatically. The guy in the front ejected downward, and he got his chute open, but the guy who was in the aisle who didn't have an ejection seat, he never got out. The three of them got out and their parachutes blossomed, and the airplane went down, and crashed on the end of the runway.

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What had happened was that my flying safety officer had an 8 millimeter camera and he was out there taking pictures of these airplanes taking off, very, very spectacular. Tremendous clouds of white smoke when the rockets are lit, and the airplanes going up like this. Interesting to see, fun to see, and everybody on the base knew it was going to happen, and they were there to watch it. And he had an 8mm camera, and the 8mm camera showed that when this guy fired the rockets, one of the rockets exploded and blew open the back of the airplane and ignited the jet fuel, and then all the other bottles went flying. The fifteen were flying around like rockets on their own going in every direction. It was a materiel failure because of the rocket case rupturing when it ignited. But to make a long story short ...

Q: So that aborted this mission?

PERNA: Yes. We went to a neighboring base over in Fort Worth, and landed, then I came back. Then everybody in the Air Force descended on us because it was so embarrassing. Not only had we killed a man, but we had gone to the President to get permission to do this, and the first time we do it, it turns to "glue." It was a function of the JATO bottle exploding. Well, I collected some "scars" from this one, and although I was exonerated, that it was not a supervisory error, and it was not command error, it was materiel failure, I had a good premonition that it was a good time to leave the Strategic Air Command.

They gave me the opportunity to say where I wanted to go, and I said I wanted to go to Paris, if I could take my family. They gave me the Strategic Air Command post in Paris, which was a job to provide the NATO Commander with American air strikes if the war ever began. We allocated so many mission to NATO from our war plan, and I was the guy who was the in between the American massive effort of how many we would give to the NATO authority. General (Norstad) was the Commander of NATO at that time, and I had a small office, and all the communications necessary to allocate him the missions. I stayed there

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for about a year. I went through the NATO College as a member of the NATO college 16th Class, in 1960.

Q: Where was this?

PERNA: This was downtown Paris, Champs de Mars, right near the Eiffel Tower. We were students at the NATO college, then I was at this SAC job. Then I went to work at the NATO Headquarters as a military representative to the Secretary General of the NATO organization. Paul Henri Spaak was then the Secretary General and he had a military structure called the "Standing Group." I was the American member of the Standing Group in the Paris office. I stayed there for a couple of years. Then I came home. I went to the National War College. (In addition to graduating from the National War College in '63, I managed to get my Masters degree in Political Science from George Washington University, in D.C.) The NWC is where they train officers who are going to be Generals. I went from there to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At that time, Maxwell Taylor was the Chairman, and McNamara was the Secretary of Defense, and Kennedy's administration had arrived. I was the officer in charge of the NATO desk. I prepared the papers for the Joint Chiefs on NATO subjects.

Q: At the Pentagon?

PERNA: At the Pentagon. I was there for two years and hated it. It was a blind alley. Very important, very high level. You're right in the middle of everything, and you're at the White House, and you're in Congress, and you're doing all kinds of high powered things, but there really was no future in it. It was back breaking, long hard hours, and I asked the Air Force to give me another job. They gave me the job in Israel to go as the Attach#. I went in 1965 and came back in 1969. I had about four and a half years. I returned in December, 1969, then I retired in the first of the year 1970. Then I became a farmer in Browntown, Virginia. And here I am.

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Q: Right. Let's talk more, if you don't mind about your stay in Israel. How were the relations between the Arabs and the Israelis when you arrived there?

PERNA: First, I want to fill you in on the background of what had happened previously, the war of 1948, and then the war of Suez were backgrounds to the time I arrived in 1965. The Fatah was the primary arm of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The PLO was established, and chartered, and headed by Arafat.

Q: Already at that time?

PERNA: He was in the hierarchy. Whether he was in control, I'm not sure, he was in control in '65. I think so. But the Fatah was running raids against the Israelis and the Israelis were retaliating and it was a series of events that went on until the beginning of the Six Day War. The relations between the Arabs and the Israelis were poor. The Palestinians were under the control of Jordan. They had large numbers of refugees in camps on the West bank. Two camps out in the Jordan Valley, a big camp between Hadera and Nablus and another camp near Nablus, another camp north of Jerusalem and large camps in the Gaza strip. These camps were populated by the people who ran away during the war of independence in 1948 and never got back. Thus from '48 until '67, almost 20 years, a whole generation of people lived there. However, the ones who had education, and the ones who had contacts, and the ones who had means got out and they went to work in Kuwait, and they went to work in Saudi Arabia, and they went to work in other Arab countries and a lot of them got integrated in Jordan and in Lebanon. These Palestinians were skilled and they were well educated by comparison to the other people, so they didn't have trouble finding jobs in these places. In modern times, in Desert Storm, they had large numbers of Palestinians still working in Kuwait. Anyway these refugee camps were being run by the United Nations who fed, housed, and educated them, and ran schools and health clinics. The people who were in there were the people who had no skills to sell, who were economically and socially down the ladder, and interested in going back to Haifa, and back to Jaffa, and back to the farms where they had been before. It

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was very sad with miserable conditions. Why they stayed was in part because the hostage policy of the Arab governments to keep them there in order that international opinion would be on their side. The Arab governments believed that these people must be given the opportunity to go back where they came from.

The terrorists came from these refugee camps. It was a place where people had nothing, and the kids joined radical movements. It wasn't like someone who had a business and who had a lot to lose, he was not going to let his kid go out bombing an Israeli train or a bus because he'd have a great deal to lose. The ones in the refugee camps didn't have much to lose. Recruiters looking for terrorists got them from refugee camps. Anyway, it was not a good situation and the tensions were high and the Israelis were on guard all the time around this green line border. Events leading up to the six day war were... Before I go to that, I wanted to say something about the question of how the Israelis managed to prevail when they were so small in numbers against these vastly superior numerical forces. At this time the Arabs had large inventories of Soviet munitions, aircraft, tanks, and artillery. The policy of the Soviet Union spreading communism was to use military sales. They were deep into Egypt with large numbers of Soviet advisors. They had equipped the Egyptian Air Force with MiGs and the Syrian Air Force with MiGs.

Q: And the Israelis as well?

PERNA: No, the Israelis had all French aircraft. De Gaulle had sold them trainers, he had sold them transports, he had sold them helicopters and fighters. They had numbers that were numerically inferior. In the case of airplanes, the Arabs in each country outnumbered them like five to one. And in tanks, they were outnumbered four to one numerically. If the Egyptians had one thousand, the Israelis had several hundred. Well, how could the Israelis succeed with these kinds of numbers. They succeeded in my judgment because they had no alternatives. If they didn't succeed, they were finished. So they had to win. This motivated the people to be ingenious, to be brave, to do their homework, and to work like hell preparing for the worst eventuality. They got all kinds of junk armaments left over

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from World War II and brought them to Israel with the help of Jewish friends in Europe and in America, and they refurbished them. These were Sherman tanks. They got all kinds of weapons carriers, half-tracks, that they gathered up that were junk from WWII left over and they refurbished them. And they used them in the Suez war.

Q: They were buying this in different countries?

PERNA: Buying them from junk dealers and there was no prohibition on this. And we didn't care. As a consequence, their determination made up for their inferiority in numbers. And they prevailed in these two wars, the War of Independence and the War of Suez. When we get to 1967, the Arabs were now heavily armed with Soviet equipment. The Egyptians and the Jordanians had large amounts of British equipment. Some American arms were in Jordan. The Syrians had almost 100% Soviet arms and the Lebanese did not have much of a significant force. There were the Saudis equipped with British and American arms. The Iraqis were equipped principally with Soviet arms. The events that led up to the Six Day War, were the frictions of the Palestinian problems, the refugees wanted to get back and the fact that the military were getting stronger and stronger in each of these countries. Nasser caused the war by moving a number of divisions, armored divisions into the Sinai. He came across the Canal and brought them down as far as the Gaza strip and the southern border of Israel and scared the Israelis. The Syrians who had been allied with the Egyptians in the United Arab Republic were now separate at the beginning of the Six Day War, but they were also mobilized.

Q: Weren't they talking about the Golan Heights at that time?

PERNA: Yes. The Golan Heights were the mountains overlooking the Jordan Valley where the Syrians had gun emplacements and tank emplacements and periodically fired onto the settlements down below. The settlements had air raid shelters where they all spent lots and lots of nights when they were being bombed. But the crowning blow was when the Egyptians closed the straits of Tiran. The straits of Tiran are at the bottom of the Gulf

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of Aqaba, where the Israelis have a port called Elat, and that's where their shipping went out that dealt with Africa and dealt with Southeast Asia. Next to Elat there's a Jordanian port of Aqaba, and the gulf is called the Gulf of Aqaba. The bottom end of it, the straits, are a narrow passage that control access into this gulf of Aqaba. The Egyptians told the UN, who had a contingent there, to leave. These were UN hangovers from Suez days, and also told the UN to get out of the Sinai. They scared the Israelis sufficiently that they mobilized. Everybody in Israel is in the army, women and men. The women go for two years and the men go for three years and then they are on reserve duty until they become 50 years old. And after 50, they become letter carriers and air raid wardens, and other quasi-official helpers. But they mobilized and they took all the buses and they took all the trucks and all the civilian equipment and they put together a force in the Negev, facing the Egyptians across the green line. The Egyptians called on the Jordanians to come in and the Jordanians came in. and the Israelis were frightened enough that they fired the first shots. They preempted the Arab forces that were mobilized. In the north, Syrians and Iraqis, Saudis, Jordanians, and the Egyptians in the South. In the series of air strikes on June 6th, they caught the air forces of the Arab neighbors on the ground and destroyed 95% of their air power on the ground. With control of the skies and air superiority, they then proceeded to beat up the Egyptian armor and the Egyptian tank battalions that were in the Sinai. Their forces crossed the border and they had a big engagement there, and with control of the air they had mastery of the battlefield.

Q: You were there at the time, and these were French aircraft they were using?

PERNA: The Israeli were using all French aircraft and they were using their trainers as well. They armed the trainers with rockets, used these "fougas" as tank busters ...

Q: I'm sorry, I don't know what trainers are?

PERNA: A trainer is a plane that you use for training pilots, not normally for combat, but they armed them with machine guns and with rockets and augmented the Mirages,

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Oregans, and Mysteres. They engaged the Arab armor because they had no enemy in the air. They shot up all the armored forces that were on the ground. And they made quick work of the Egyptians in about 3 days and then they went to the north and started up the Golan Heights and advanced to within about 35 miles of Damascus; they finally got a cease fire and stopped.

Q: Who called the cease fire then?

PERNA: The US was pressuring them to stop and world opinion was pressuring for them to stop. They agreed once they had control of the Golan Heights. Once they had control of the Sinai and they had conquered the Egyptians, they did not want to go to Cairo, they did not want to cross the canal. They had driven the Jordanian forces back across the Jordan River and they had control of the West bank. Now they had gone all the way over the Judean hills and down into the Jordan Valley and they had everything. The Golan Heights, the whole Jordan Valley down to Elat, all of the Sinai...

Q: They felt protected? Their settlements were protected?

PERNA: There were settlements in the north, but the Golan Heights could no longer bother those because they had pushed the Syrians back, and this was a stunning military success. I was there all the time. They wouldn't let me fly. I had an aircraft that I leased most of the time. They made me take a baby sitter with me when I flew, and I flew a lot, but I always had to take an Israeli along with me, so that he could see what I was doing. They had areas where they wouldn't let me go. I was in a car most of the time and on the road, watching as close as I could get to the fighting. I was under fire a couple times when they were bombing, and I burned up the engine in the car one day running like hell at high speed.

Q: In the other direction?

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PERNA: Yes, I was running away from some Syrian aircraft that were trying to bomb Nazareth. I was right at the edge of the city.

We had sent our families to Rome when we saw what was going to happen.

Q: Was that the whole Embassy?

PERNA: No. It was an optional evacuation. A few wives stayed who didn't have kids, but the ones who had children took them and went to Rome. The Embassy did not come under attack, Tel Aviv did not come under attack. A few shells landed in Tel Aviv when it started. The Jordanians shot some artillery to Tel Aviv, but it was not consequential.

Q: What were you doing then, aside from being shot at? You were reporting?

PERNA: Our job was observing and reporting. We had all of our Attach#s watching what was going on. We were getting briefed by the Israelis and we had messages from our Embassies in Lebanon and in Amman and in Cairo, and we were comparing notes and we were reporting to Washington about what was going on. We had been asked when the mobilization started, what we predicted. We got together in our office, and with the Ambassador's approval, we said we did not think it would go more than 10 days or two weeks at the outside. This was our estimate. And we were very proud of the fact that we had said not more than two weeks. Actually it was over in 6 days. Our reports were going in daily. Everything that we could see and everything that we could hear. The Israelis were giving us briefings which were canned and what they wanted to tell us. We took that and repeated them and sent them in saying this had been given us by the Israeli Air Force or the Foreign Liaison office or whoever gave the briefing.

Q: And then you say that the Israelis were pressured to have a cease fire. Did that come through the Embassies?

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PERNA: Yes. The mechanics of why they stopped can best be answered by the fact that they had achieved their objectives, that is to get rid of the threat of the forces that had mobilized on their borders, and once they got rid of the threat they had no reason to go on. They had no objectives of going to Damascus, or going to Cairo. So they had achieved their objectives. We were of course trying to stop them before it ever started. It was against our interest to have war anywhere, and we tried to inhibit them. It had little effect. But once they achieved their objectives, they stopped.

Q: Now, they were in the Sinai, and they had the Golan Heights, and they stayed there?

PERNA: Yes, and the West Bank up to the Jordan River. And unfortunately, large numbers of Palestinian fled during the Six Day War across into Jordan, and into Syria, and into Lebanon, and into Egypt and they further populated the refugee camps. A case can be made why didn't these countries move those people out of the camps and absorb them. However, they wanted them to go back to the land where they had come from. This has been the source of friction down through the years.

The period following the Six Day War was complicated because De Gaulle didn't want them to go to war, and De Gaulle had told them that if they began fighting, he was going to shut off all their supplies. Their tanks, their aircrafts, and their supplies were French. He said: "You will get no supplies if you go to war." And they went to war. He shut them off and set up an embargo on all supplies. Following the Six Day War, they could get no French supplies. This is when they came to us and begged us to sell them arms. We had given them some help with anti-aircraft missiles, these were Hawk missiles, to intercept aircraft, low flying aircraft. We had sold them some Hawks, and subsequently, we sold them some A4s, which were fighter bombers.

Q: There were no nuclear weapons at that time in the area?

PERNA: We don't know, the Israeli nuclear capability. Let me put it aside for a minute, and I'll get to it in a little while. But on the arms situation ... because they were dependent on French supplies, they had no way to get arms from anybody, once De Gaulle had shut them off, so they came to us, and we did not want to sell them arms. We did not want to sell them because we had friends in the moderate Arabs countries, and we didn't want to destroy the sources of our oil, and our other strategic interests in the area. We were reluctant to arm the Israelis with American equipment. However, the American policy had been that, from the time of Truman, in 1948, when we first recognized them, we supported the concept that the US believed in the integrity and supported the integrity of the state of Israel. This was from the time of their declaration of independence, when the country was partitioned between Arabs and Jews, and we said that we supported the territorial integrity of the state of Israel. Our concept, strategically, how we would support them, was to try to prevent wars, and if the war started, we would try to stop the war by interceding. This was a bankrupt policy. There's no way you can get in between the forces that had large amounts of Soviet armor and the Israelis with their armor, and try to say: "Stop boys." It won't work. The Ambassador discussed this at length with the Attach#s and we convinced him that if the United States wanted to preserve the territorial integrity of the state of Israel, we needed to give them the opportunity to buy weapons in order to take care of themselves, so that we didn't have to try and come at the eleventh hour to try and help them. The policy changed after the Six Day War when De Gaulle put an embargo on things they needed. The Russians rapidly rearmed Syria and rapidly rearmed Egypt, with airplanes and tanks and artillery. The Ambassador recommended that the US supply arms and the State Department and the Defense Department vetoed it. However, the White House approved it.

Q: So this came from the Embassy in Israel?

PERNA: In Israel, yes. We recommended it, and the State Department and the Defense Department disapproved it, but the White House approved. And we began a program

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of selling them selected weapons. The first big sale was the F4 fighter. A lot of things happened at the end of the Six Day War. We were fighting in Vietnam and we wanted to know as much as we could about Soviet armament, and we were successful in getting access to a whole series of really important weapons that our Army and Air Force, and Navy wanted to know about. The SA2, that's a surface to air missile that had high altitude capability. The Soviet tanks, their modern tanks. In this period, they were equipping the Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, and the Chinese. The Israelis had radar, and artillery and a lot of stuff that we were interested in, that were captured during the Six Day War. We were successful in arranging for Americans to exploit this material and to know how it worked. Some of it was sent to America and some was examined and exploited in Israel by teams that came in. We were extremely busy in the hardware business. Not only in setting up a procurement program for American stuff to be sold to them, but by exploiting the Soviet equipment which the Israelis had captured during the Six Day War.

Q: Did some people come over from the States then?

PERNA: We had teams, Army and Navy and Air Force teams that came, and they examined the captured material. Some of the material, we shipped back to the States. They examined it, and studied it at centers that we had for this purpose. It was a bonanza for the army in particular to get access to these Soviet radars, and Soviet missiles, artillery and armor.

Q: And so the Israelis released this to the US?

PERNA: Under a great deal of pressure and bargaining, by very tough business deals. "Yes, we'll let you have it, but we want this, and this, and this in exchange." They would have a lot of trading that went on and a lot of it got to the point where I couldn't help, and sent them to Washington. They went over there, and thrashed it out. Because all I could do was to be a messenger boy and take the messages. "Would you give these guys a certain kind of radar, and they'll give us a MiG 15." I couldn't make these decisions. We got

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the thing going and sat back and watched, and it worked well, exchanging vast amounts of materiel. The Israelis also took all of this captured equipment and refurbished it and put the Israeli Star of David on it and they now are still equipped with Soviet tanks which they captured.

Q: It was an exciting time.

PERNA: It was exciting. The sad part of it was that the refugees who were now, probably doubled in numbers because of the number of Palestinians who ran away during the Six Day War. These poor, unfortunate, poorly educated, low skilled people were the ones who got trapped, often with large families and they're now in the camps since 1967. The UN passed a number of resolutions, 242 was the big one. 242 said that the Israelis should give back the territory of captured land from the Six Day War, and that the Arabs should recognize secure borders for Israel. Well, the Arabs wouldn't even recognize the existence of the state. They had boycotted any business that did business with Israel, they wouldn't do business with them and they just pretended that the state didn't exist. They would not recognize there was a state of Israel. There was a whole series of events going on at this time in the UN passing resolutions about how you do this and you do that in terms of trying to clean up the aftermath of the war. The Israeli occupied the Golan Heights to about 18 miles. And the UN put a buffer zone between Syria and the Israelis, and set up observation posts ...

Q: UN observation posts?

PERNA: Yes, and they were staffed by people who were non-partisan, so to speak, a lot of Danes, a lot of Scandinavians. They established a border with the Egyptians along the Red Sea, in the Sinai, and the UN was there observing. The Israelis held the Sinai and of course they held it until Sadat and Begin many years later in 1978 agreed at Camp David to give back the Sinai for peace with the Egyptians. That's another chapter, but the immediate aftermath of the war was a great flurry of UN activities. Attempts to bring these

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refugee people back, there were fights in Israel on who could come back and join families and who couldn't. There were hardliners who wanted to kick them all out, forever, and there were others who said, this is no good, you've got to live with them, you've got to let them come back and they fought the thing on a case by case basis. Sometimes families were reunited and came back...

Q: Palestinians?

PERNA: Yes.

Q: Was there terrorism at that time, had it started?

PERNA: After the Six Day War, there was a quiet period.

Q: It hadn't started yet?

PERNA: Yes, there was terrorism in '68 and '69, and there were a number of things connected with the war that should be mentioned. One was the fact, that we had a communications ship like the Pueblo, which was captured in Korea. We had a communications eavesdropper, a spy ship called the Liberty which was in the Eastern Mediterranean and which the Israelis bombed and strafed and killed several dozens Americans, I think 35 or 36 Americans on this ship. This was on the second day of hostilities.

Q: This was an American Navy ship?

PERNA: This was an American ship. Actually it was run by the American intelligence people, NSA. They had staffs of Navy people and they were from the agency that was involved in listening, not only to the Soviets, but to everybody. That was their business. The Israelis claimed that it was mistaken identity. In the heat of battle, the heat of war, they thought it was Egyptian. They did not think it was American. They thought it was Egyptian and they had some bad "snafus" in their control center, one team changing and another

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team coming on, failed to tell the team coming on that there was a plot of a target out there that had been recorded previously. And in the confusion, the next time it was sighted they said it was unidentified. And the Israeli Air Force attacked it and before they stopped, they had shot it up and killed some 35 people. The Israeli government apologized profusely, and said it was a mix up, it was not deliberate. It was an error, they were sorry, and they promised recompense, etc. This has been a bone of contention down through the years and journalists have tried very hard to make a case both on television and in the printed journalism that the Israelis did it deliberately. Our position at the Embassy after sending my Naval Attach# out there and flying over in an helicopter and doing everything that we could, and checking with the Ambassador, we reported to Washington that we had no grounds upon which to dispute the statements that the Israeli government made. It was an official government position that they had made a mistake and that it was an error in the heat of war, and that they were sorry. They admitted it and said that they would pay the damage, which they ultimately did. But the case has never ended. There is still a lot of people, including families of the wounded and of the fatalities who believe that it is legitimate to make a case that this was done deliberately. I accepted the Israeli position.

But in saying that I accept their explanation on the Liberty case, I would make this kind of a general qualifier. The Israelis could do anything, no matter how bad it embarrasses us, and no matter how bad it insults us, if they think it's in their own national interest, if they think it's a big enough issue, in their own national interest, and we get a black eye from it, they will do it. And so will we, and so will any country. This is not restricted to the Israelis. But it was a bad episode. The ship limped off west under its own power, and they got the casualties off, and the Navy came to rescue them, etc.

The period following the Six Day War was equally deeply involved with the UN resolutions: Would they give back this? and would they give back that?" etc. And a quick synopsis goes like this. The Arab countries would not recognize any boundaries other than the original green line that existed when the Six Day War began. The green line was decided on the island of Rhodes in 1948, and the Israelis said no way will we go back. They have

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an area in the middle of the country where there is only 11 miles from the green line to the ocean and this separates Haifa and the Galilee from the plains of Sharon and down to Tel Aviv. The plains of Sharon is the coastal area going down to Tel Aviv and then further south towards Beersheba and Jerusalem. But that 11 mile area they will never have again.

Jerusalem, they will never have divided again. Jerusalem, they have made their capital and they have built big apartment complexes all around in areas which had been Arab. We don't have our Embassy in Jerusalem. Our Embassy is in Tel Aviv. Most other countries have their Embassies in Jerusalem. But the Brits and the French are still in Tel Aviv and I think the Germans and some of the other NATO allies are still there. The Soviets of course left at the beginning of the Six Day War and they're just now reestablishing diplomatic relations. They haven't had them since 67, but they're about to renew them.

But the city of Jerusalem is never going to be divided again. The Israelis will go to war over it. And although there are large numbers of Arabs living in Jerusalem, there's a whole Arab sector in the old city and Bethlehem is Arab completely. To my knowledge there are no Jews living in Bethlehem. But in the area of Jerusalem there are large populations in areas where they have apartment complexes, shopping centers, libraries, swimming pools, hospitals, schools, etc. There are about six of these areas around the city.

The West Bank has the Israeli settlements, as you know, for various reasons. Those zealots who wanted to force the Arabs out are trying to do it by building settlements and pushing them. Those who are militarily oriented want the settlements to be in positions to stop any attack that might come in the future, principally on the high ground, strategic positions, and along the Jordan River. Since Rabin came to power, (and I know him well, he was Chief of Staff during the Six Day War. I entertained him at home lots of times, traveled with him) he's more of a dove than Shamir who was a hawk. He's talking now, and there's a possibility that he will negotiate an interim government for five years, give the Palestinians some kind of a police force of their own and permit them to run their own infrastructure. Presently, the Israeli military takes care of the roads, and the

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communications, and the electricity and all that. They will give that over to the Palestinians and they will give them some measure of self rule. They won't let them have military defense, military self-defense, although they will let them have a police force. We're talking about a three thousand man police force. The Israelis will control foreign relations. They won't let the Palestinian run foreign relations. But everything else, they will let them do themselves. Run their own jurisprudence system, run their own tax system, run everything themselves. And they've stopped construction on some six thousand housing units. And it looks now like Rabin is going, hopefully, to push to get these talks going. Baker was just there a few days ago, and the prospects are that if the zealots on each side don't take too much control that there can be a period of relative quiet, and this will keep the factions from raising hell. There will be terrorist attacks, and there will be bombs, and there will be this kind of stuff going on, still, but an interim plan is possible.

Q: This is the future?

PERNA: Yes.

Q: Who was Prime Minister when you were there?

PERNA: When I first got there, Levi Eshkol had the Prime Minister's job as the head of the Labor government. Their politics are interesting. They have 21 parties and the only reason they don't have more is because there are only 21 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and each have a letter that designates their party. So if you get two Jews together, you have three opinions, and this is the way it is with their politics. There are extreme left idealistic communists, who have some kibbutzim who are communist. Really. I mean working communism you can see. Each person according to his needs, each person gives according to his abilities. Then you have extreme conservative capitalists on the other side, who own cement factories, and automobile factories, aircraft factories and munitions factories, who are extremely well off. And in between these two, you have a whole number of grades and shades. The big party had been historically under Levi Eshkol, the Labor

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party. He had Abba Eban as his Foreign Minister. Subsequently, when he died, Golda Meir came to power, and she was a Labor party candidate also. Dayan was the Minister of Defense at the time of the Six Day War. He had been their representative to the peace conference in Rhodes in '48. Then he had worked his way up to the Chief of Staff. He was a capable , personable, effective Minister of Defense. The Chief of Staff was Rabin. He was not as effective in my judgment, as a number of his Generals. Particularly Tal, and Ariel Sharon, and Al Azhar who ran the northern operation against the Syrians. There were a number of very, very proficient and effective generals at the two star level who made Rabin look very good. But he was not that broad gauged, but he had some very good people. One of his abilities was to surround himself with good people. Ezer Weizman had been the head of the Air Force and built the Air Force. Rabin brought him in as an Air Force officer on the General Staff as Chief of Operations. A fellow named Motti Hod became Chief of Staff of the Air Force. He was a skilled tactician and very good leader. Rabin's forte was the fact that he picked really good guys, but he was, on a scale of one to ten, a 5 or 6. But he had generals who were 8, and 9, and 10, who were doing the real things. I wasn't in on it, but the scuttlebutt was that he had had a nervous breakdown in the first few days of the Six Day War.

Q: Rabin?

PERNA: Yes. He has recovered nicely and has become the Prime Minister. Previously, he became the Ambassador in Washington. And he got into some kind of disgrace when he was the Ambassador because of an honorarium being paid to him and to his wife for speeches and what they were doing with the money, and so on. But he's weathered all that and he's now the head of the Labor party again and they won the majority with their coalition, and believe me it's a coalition. It's a wall to wall coalition from the extreme right to the extreme left. All these different parties, including the extremely religious guys who have a few members and a few votes. And there's an ex Chief of Staff who has a party, with about 6 or 8 votes, and he's got his people with him. And there's a lot of problems in getting a majority, but although I haven't been there in a few years, the feeling in the

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country seems to be that they want to find some way to solve this problem of Jews and Arabs living together.

Q: Going back to an earlier question then. Did the Israelis have nuclear weapons? How did they get them?

PERNA: OK. We essentially have ended the talks on the Six Day War and the post Six Day War period. We didn't dwell very much on the Yom Kippur War. I wasn't there at the time, so it's second hand information that I have. We brought ourselves up to date. Now, to go back and talk about the Israelis' nuclear capability. To begin with the Israeli government developed a nuclear reactor at a place called Dimona in the Negev desert. This is about 80 miles south of Tel Aviv and it is about 30 miles southwest of Beersheba. It is out in the middle of the desert. They built a compound there to develop a nuclear reactor, ostensibly for the purpose of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Throughout the world, many of the nations who have the capability have built nuclear reactors. OK. With this as a start, their problem was to get enriched uranium or heavy water or the ingredients to make weapon grades uranium. We had an inspection procedure worked out with the Israelis as well as with a number of other nations where on a reciprocal basis, they were allegedly opening nuclear facilities so the world could see that these were not to proliferate nuclear weapons. The Israelis participated in this program. Prior to my arrival in '65, there were American teams that went in to the Dimona reactor and from what they were permitted to see, they concluded that it was a peaceful use of nuclear energy. They don't have any power plants that are nuclear powered in Israel. They make their power with coal and oil.

In the period from '65 to '69, I tried very hard to find out what the Israelis were doing.

Q: Did you get to visit the plant?

PERNA: I did not ever get inside the plant. I flew near the area. It was a prohibited area to fly over and I drove around it as close as you could get without being obvious. But there was an ambivalent attitude on the part of the US government which reflected itself

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in the policies of our Embassy. Rather than pursue an aggressive spying operation to try and develop some really good, hard knowledge about the Israeli capability, it was my feeling that Washington was just as happy that we didn't bring this subject to a head and cause incidents and cause bad feelings, etc. So I had my staff essentially lay off trying to penetrate the subject overtly. This doesn't mean that we didn't do a lot of collecting of ancillary and correlated information. We knew that they were building missiles and we knew of certain details connected with the development of the program on the Jericho. The Jericho was an intermediate range rocket capable of carrying a nuclear head.

Ok, having said that, it develops over the years that the Israelis obtained weapons grade materials from several unknown sources. Correspondents, journalists have alleged that they got most of their help from France. The reactor was built with French technical help during the period when France was a principal supplier of all of Israel's armaments and supplies and equipment. The French technicians who lived in Beersheba and worked at the plant were numerous. There were some leaks by French civilian employees which were picked up by journalists and other sources suggesting that the peaceful uses of nuclear energy was not the primary mission of Dimona. It was also believed that they had gone deeply underground in order to build laboratories and facilities for production that were not evident when inspection teams came from the International Atomic Energy Commission to look and see what was going on. It was easy for them to hide. This has been speculated on by a number of journalists and other technicians. There were investigations conducted about possibilities that they got some weapons grade material out of the United States. A number of prominent American Jewish leaders' names surfaced during this investigation. I don't think it is useful for me to cite names because I don't have definitive backup to support presumptions in this area, so I will bypass that. The sum and substance of it is that they got the material either from America or from France or from some other source to give them the capability to develop weapons grade material. They have never admitted that they have nuclear weapons. The policy of the Israeli government has been from the very beginning and continues to be enunciated in a statement that goes

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like this: "The government of Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East." They have been consistent in that policy all the time. Well, so what? What do I think. I think that they ran a test program with the South Africans in the Indian ocean somewhere, probably in the mid to latter '60s...

Q: When you were there?

PERNA: Yes, when they detonated a device. This was never confirmed by either government. However, there are means of collecting the bad news about people blowing off big explosions in space, and the collectors got an indication that something went off down there. I surmise that it was a joint Israeli-South African test and I surmise that the Israelis and the South Africans have cooperated closely, possibly in the area of obtaining weapons grade uranium and other source material for making bombs and for making plutonium and the ingredients. I give them credit from a gut feeling of having worked and lived with them of being capable of delivering nuclear weapons by several means. I think they're capable of delivering them by air, I think they're capable of delivering them by rocket, and I think they're capable of delivering them by artillery. This knowhow is not the sole property of the Soviets, the Americans, the British, and the French. The scientific community knows how to do this and I think the Israelis have developed their own capability in these areas. If I had to guess I would say that they have an arsenal that probably numbers in the dozens of nuclear devices. I also think that they are very prudent about the consequences of employing them, and although we used the bomb on Hiroshima and on Nagasaki, it has become apparent to both the Soviets and the Americans during the cold war as well as the British and the French, and the Chinese, that this is a no win policy to start detonating nuclear devices. The consequences are so horrendous to the planet that this is not a good idea. We used nuclear weapons by the thousands to deter the Russians and they used them to deter us, and unfortunately now we are faced with the prospect of the Russian Republics having some thirty thousand plus of these things, under new independent republic governments and we're trying to get

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treaties engineered with the Soviets to get these things under control. But the Israelis I think realize that it would be as impossible for them to use it as it was for us to use it.

Q: It is a...

PERNA: As a deterrent it is a good gadget. But it would be at the eleventh hour when all else had failed and the Arabs were at their throat that they would employ nuclear weapons, in my judgement.

Q: Heaven forbid.

PERNA: Yes.

Q: When did you leave Israel then?

PERNA: We finished our tour in the end of October of '69, and came back to Washington, where they sent me on a debriefing tour to go to the major commands and give them a briefing of the Arab-Israeli situation as it stood at the end of '69. I did that in all of the major Army and Air Force Command Headquarters. I then returned to the Pentagon and had a retirement ceremony on the 1st of February 1970.

Q: You had decided to retire then?

PERNA: Yes. I was assigned in the Pentagon when I got back home in November '69, and I spent December and January touring the major commands, and briefing, and then retired on the 1st of February. That was the end of my military service. Subsequently, I went back to Israel each year and had an opportunity to keep my hand in so to speak on what was going on. I got accredited as a journalist and was given press credentials by the Israelis. I went over 4 or 5 times in the years subsequent to my retirement, and I wrote articles for local newspapers and for some other publications. My last trip was in '85. I haven't been back since '85.

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Q: Well, good. I think we can stop there. Happy retirement, and thank you very much.

End of interview